

to nearly 2,500. There were 662 Rangers' reports received during the year, and each of these had to be carefully checked, recorded, and analysed to see whether the selector was in arrear or otherwise with his improvements, and that the conditions for the particular purpose for which the report had been made were complied with. All defaulters had to be entered in schedules for the Land Board to deal with, and the necessary notices sent out, and followed up from time to time, to insure prompt steps being taken by the selectors to comply with the conditions of the Act. This work requires very careful supervision and intimate knowledge of all the conditions; and continual reference has to be made to the records to see that the necessary action is taken at the right time.

The work in connection with the Land Board has continued to increase very much. In several sittings the applications for land, titles, transfers, and general subjects, were so numerous as to necessitate the extension of the meeting to the following day.

The outward and inward correspondence, including reports of Rangers, surveyors, and notices *re* payments due from selectors, &c., aggregated over 42,500 letters, &c., or an average of about 142 per day. This is an increase over last year of 6,500. There were 254 records received from other departments and dealt with; 1,168 vouchers passed through for payment, representing a sum of £20,563; and 705 cheques for wages, &c., were drawn on my imprest account, amounting to £5,933.

The field staff consisted of sixteen parties and one Inspector, besides contract and Native Land Court surveyors.

The office work during the year has been exceptionally heavy, owing in a great measure to the various changes of tenure allowed by the Land Acts. These necessitate, in each case, seeing that the conditions of the lease have been complied with up to the date of conversion, surrender by the lessee of the original lease, computation of new rentals and amendment of the registers, and the issue and registration of the new lease, &c., all of which entails an immense amount of work on the office before the transaction is finally completed; and the number of applications is increasing very rapidly.

In concluding my report, I have to express my thanks generally to the officers of this department for the very cordial way they have worked with me during the five years I have had the management of this office, and for their efforts to keep pace with the ever-increasing work of the department, especially to the Chief Draughtsman, who has the control and responsibility of conducting the work in my absence, and to the Chief Clerk, who has had to aid me in coping with the immense increase in the correspondence and general work in the office. That this increase is not an imaginary one the increased number of letters received and despatched shows, the number during the first year I entered on my duties as Chief Commissioner being, in 1890-91, 19,085; 1895-96, 42,505: showing the correspondence of the office has more than doubled during that time. This large increase of work, which is not only confined to the correspondence, has thrown much additional work on all who have the responsibility of carrying it out.

JOHN H. BAKER,  
Commissioner of Crown Lands.

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